

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-10 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4431

DIA WASHDC

CIA WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USCINCEUR

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE BEIRUT 6497

E.O. 11652: N/A DECON 5/21/76

TAGS: PINS, LE, PLO

SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION IN LEBANON

REFS: BEIRUT 5387, 5753 AND 6284

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1. PAST 36 HOURS HAVE WITNESSED RECURRENT OUTBREAKS OF AUTOMATIC

WEAPONS AND ROCKET FIRE BETWEEN PHALANGIST AND FEDAYEEN ELEMENTS IN AREA OF TEL ZAATAR CAMP AND NEARBY BEIRUT CHRISTIAN SUBURB OF DEKWANEH (FBIS JN 201621Y AND TA 20201Y). FIRING SEEMS TO HAVE DIED DOWN THIS MORNING MAY 21, BUT NOT BEFORE AT LEAST FIVE PERSONS WERE REPORTED KILLED AND UP TO 40 WOUNDED (MOST OF THEM APPARENTLY INNOCENT BYSTANDERS). SHOOTING BEGAN IN EARNEST AROUND MIDNIGHT MAY 19-20, FOLLOWING ARREST PREVIOUS DAY BY LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES OF SEVERAL PALESTINIANS CAUGHT LOOTING CERTAIN HOUSES VACATED BY THEIR RESIDENTS ON PERIMETER OF DEKWANEH. CURRENT LULL APPEARS TO BE DUE TO EFFORTS BY GOL SECURITY OFFICIALS, PLO AND PHALANGIST LEADERSHIP TO IMPOSE RESTRAINT ON THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SHOOTING, BUT TENSIONS REPORTEDLY ARE STILL HIGH, DEKWANEH-TEL ZAATAR AREA IS CLOSED TO ALL TRAFFIC, AND VIRTUAL CURFEW IS BEING MAINTAINED THERE. LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF) ARE STATIONED IN CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH AT MAJOR INTERSECTIONS AND OTHER KEY POSITIONS IN AND AROUND THE AREA, AND THEIR PRESENCE AND PATROLS CAN BE OBSERVED IN OTHER PARTS OF BEIRUT.

2. GENERAL ATMOSPHERE OF UNEASINESS AND FOREBODING THAT EXISTS THROUGHOUT BEIRUT WAS AUGMENTED LATE MAY 19 BY PROCLAMATION OF "GENERAL STRIKE" BY LEFTIST, PRO-FEDAYEEN GROUPS ON MAY 22 TO COMMEMORATE PALESTINIAN VICTIMS OF APRIL 13 INCIDENT AT AIN RUMMANEH SUBURB. THIS WAS FOLLOWED ON EVENING MAY 21 BY DECISION OF BEIRUT MERCHANTS TO HOLD TWO-DAY (MAY 21-22) STRIKE IN PROTEST AGAINST ABYSMAL SECURITY CONDITIONS IN BEIRUT AND COUNTRY AT LARGE. (LATTER STRIKE IS SO FAR ONLY PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE, WITH MANY BEIRUT SHOPS AND SCHOOLS CLOSED BUT MOST BANKS AND OTHER BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS WARILY REMAINING OPEN. TRAFFIC THROUGHOUT TOWN IS NOTICEABLY LIGHT.)

3. IN MEANTIME, PHALANGIST SPOKESMEN ARE LOUDLY ACCUSING FEDAYEEN OF INSTIGATING LATEST OUTBREAKS OF FIRING, WHILE INSISTING THAT PHALANGIST FORCES IN DEKWANEH AND ELSEWHERE HAVE BEEN ACTING WITH RESTRAINT. (LEBANESE ARMY G-2 CONFIRMS THAT PHALANGISTS HAVE GENERALLY OBSERVED ORDERS FROM PARTY LEADERSHIP NOT TO REPLY TO FIRING FROM TEL ZAATAR CAMP, BUT WE UNDERSTAND PHALANGIST FORCES WENT ON FULL ALERT EVENING OF MAY 20 IN ORDER TO REOCCUPY POSITIONS AND ROADBLOCKS THEY MAINTAINED DURING LAST MONTH'S CLASHES IF SITUATION DETERIORATES FURTHER.) PLO PROPAGANDA APPARATUS, FOR ITS PART, HAS BEEN CRANKING OUT ALARMIST WARNINGS OF IMPENDING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ISRAELI ATTACK ON LOCAL REFUGEE CAMPS FOR SEVERAL DAYS, AND IT WOULD APPEAR THAT SUBSTANTIAL SEGMENT OF LOCAL PALESTINIAN AND LEFTIST OPINION VIEWS LATEST SHOOTING INCIDENTS AS EFFORT BY PHALANGE TO CREATE SOME KIND OF "DIVERSION" AS DISTRACTION OR "COVER" FOR ISRAELI RAIDS.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH SITUATION DESCRIBED ABOVE COULD DETERIORATE AGAIN IN SHORT ORDER, WE ARE FHOPEFUL THAT FURTHER OUTBREAKS OF

FIRING CAN BE AVOIDED OR AT LEAST CONTAINED. ONE ENCOURAGING SIGN IS PRESENCE (IN CONTRAST TO SITUATION DURING LAST MONTH'S PHALANGIST-FEDAYEEN FIGHTING) OF ISF UNITS AT KEY POINTS IN AND AROUND TROUBLED AREAS. THIS PRESENCE COULD HAVE HELPFUL EFFECT IN RESTRAINING HOTHEADS ON BOTH SIDES. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THERE IS EVERY LIKELIHOOD THAT ISF--AS USUAL--HAS NO CONCRETE ORDERS FROM GOL ABOUT WHAT TO DO IF FURTHER MAJOR TROUBLE OCCURS AND MATTERS REALLY BEGIN TO GET OUT OF HAND. TOMORROW'S COMPETING "STRIKES" BY MERCHANTS AND LEFTIST, PRO-FEDAYEEN GROUPS ARE LIKELY TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNFORESEEN INCIDENTS TO HAPPEN AND THEREBY PRESENT FURTHER TEST OF GOL'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN MODICUM OF INTERNAL STABILITY AND CONTROL.
GODLEY

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